

# Geopolitical concepts of Central Europe and current reality: language perspective

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## Abstract

The article presents a critical analysis of the theory of geopolitical understanding of Central Europe, basing on the evaluation of region's contemporary situation and supported by the empirical data. The main research question is the following: is it possible in recent situation to still speak of Central Europe as a geopolitical region? The article is focused on the three traditional geopolitical concepts of Central Europe considered from the perspective of the current role of Germany as a traditional communication factor in this region. First, the idea of Mitteleuropa is analysed. Then, the perspectives of the Visegrad, concept of Austria-Hungary legacy and finally CENTROPE are closely viewed. Analysis is mostly based on empirical data available in the official documents published by EU institutions as well as official national statistical data of Central European countries. Adopted research method is a combination of historical, political geography and social linguistics approaches to the topic. The concept of Central Europe with its centre in the German-speaking countries may be currently economically and politically significant, especially from a pan-European perspective, however German linguistic hegemony is not present in any of the neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the Visegrad Group today does not include all regions and states and German is not considered there as the main language of communication.

**Keywords:** Central Europe, geopolitical region, idea of Mitteleuropa, idea of Visegrad, concept of Austria-Hungary legacy, CENTROPE, political identity, multilingualism.

## Koncepcje geopolityczne Europy Środkowej a współczesna rzeczywistość: perspektywa językowa

### Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia krytyczną analizę teorii geopolitycznego rozumienia Europy Środkowej weryfikowaną na podstawie współczesnej sytuacji i popartą danymi empirycznymi. Główne pytanie badawcze brzmi: czy w obecnej sytuacji można nadal mówić o Europie Środkowej jako regionie geopolitycznym? W artykule przyjrzymy się trzem tradycyjnym koncepcjom geopolitycznym Europy Środkowej z perspektywy obecnej roli Niemiec jako tradycyjnego czynnika komunikacyjnego tego regionu. Najpierw przeanalizowano koncepcję Mitteleuropy. Następnie dokonano analizy z perspektywy koncepcji Wyszehradu, spuścizny Austro-Węgier i ostatecznie CENTROPE. Analiza opiera

się głównie na danych empirycznych pochodzących z oficjalnych dokumentów publikowanych przez instytucje UE lub przez oficjalne krajowe urzędy statystyczne z państw Europy Środkowej. Przyjęta metoda badawcza to połączenie historycznego, polityczno-geograficznego i społeczno-lingwistycznego podejścia do tematu. Koncepcja Europy Środkowej ze swoim centrum w krajach niemieckojęzycznych może być obecnie bardzo istotna gospodarczo i politycznie z perspektywy paneuropejskiej, ale niemiecka dominacja językowa nie występuje na żadnym obszarze sąsiadującym z tymi krajami. Ponadto Grupa Wyszehradzka nie obejmuje dziś wszystkich regionów i państw, a język niemiecki nie jest uważany za główny język komunikacji.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Europa Środkowa, region geopolityczny, koncepcja Mitteleuropy, koncepcja Wyszehradu, spuścizna Austro-Węgier, CENTROPE, tożsamość polityczna, wielojęzyczność.

The aim of this study is an attempt to analyse the existing situation in Central Europe, especially in terms of whether and to what extent it corresponds to traditional geopolitical concepts of understanding Central Europe. The emphasis will be placed on the question of existence of a Central European identity, as the study of the geopolitical region cannot be limited only to the issue of inter-state regional cooperation but it must also seek to analyse deeper aspects leading to regional identity, such as the factors influencing the region's political culture. The perspective of the analysis of the current situation will be the role of language in Central Europe as a result of language policies and language behaviour in Central European countries. The current situation will be compared with the role of language as it was determined at the time of the emergence of traditional geopolitical concepts of Central Europe.

There are not very many topics like Central Europe that are so often emphasised and overlooked or even questioned (for example, see: Okey 1992; Moskalewicz, Przybylski 2017). At the same time, it is a topic that is addressed by experts in a number of fields. Physical, political and cultural geography, political science and international relations, history and art history, literary science and musicology, sociology and anthropology. Different views on this topic are very often associated with the national, ethnic, cultural or religious background of individual authors.

An art historian may remind us of the similarity of rural Baroque churches, but is that enough to clearly define Central Europe? An architect may point out the similarity of train stations in small towns of Central Europe, but is this a sufficient factor to differentiate Central Europe from other parts of the continent? There is no need to confirm the significance of Central European, mostly Jewish authors of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for world literature, but is this a sufficient factor for a political scientist to acknowledge the existence of Central Europe as an independent region? It is certain that Viennese cuisine is more Central European than Austrian, influenced by Czech or Hungarian cuisine. Again, it is a factor that says something but does not pose a clear answer to the existence of Central Europe.

For a political geographer, the question of the existence of Central Europe is rather an issue of historical political geography. All major supranational political bodies in Central Europe are a thing of the past. The Polish-Lithuanian Union as well as the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg Monarchy have all disappeared.

All in all, Central Europe seems to be a topic that is most suitable for historians, especially those dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are many topics regarding this period. Of these, I would mention the topic of the geopolitical significance of Austria after the Napoleonic wars as a creator of balance of the geopolitical axis in continental Europe between East (Russia) and West (France), or the topic of Austro-Slavism and the importance of Austria for small nations of Central Europe. Other important topics are the efforts to create *Mitteleuropa* in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as an instrument of German dominance throughout Europe, the Polish-Czechoslovak Confederation Plan during the Second World War as a bridge between East and West, or the role of Visegrad states in the first decade following the end of the Cold War, when they were politically, economically and internationally understood, unlike other post-Communist areas, as a stable region fully prepared for the participation in NATO and the European Union.

Nevertheless, for political scientists and experts in international relations, the three main geopolitical concepts of understanding Central Europe remain so important that they are still worth considering. One is the concept of Central Europe with Germany as its central point, the other is the concept of Central Europe as a space between German-speaking countries and Eastern Slavic nations, and the third concept is the issue of the persistence of bonds created by centuries of Habsburg Monarchy.

Again, it is possible to view the concepts from many angles. Perhaps the most important view is the analysis of the political and economic role these Central European concepts can play in the overall development of the European Union. The aim of this study is thus a not very frequent perspective of looking at this topic in terms of language as a possible unifying aspect in the contemporary understanding of Central Europe. The role of languages in each of these three main concepts is always a little different.

## **Theoretical approach**

Although the article is based on an analysis of empirical data, because of language perspective of the topic an analysis is constructed on contemporary sociolinguistic theories. Description of monolingualism, bilingualism and multilingualism in Central Europe follows theories of Bernard Spolsky (Spolsky 2004) as well as an application of Abram de Swaan's theory of the political economy of language constellations and language communication in that area of Europe (de Swaan 2001). Comparison between language and ethnicity and ethnicity and state in Central Europe is based on theories of Roman Szul (Szul 2009). Concept of linguistic transnational identity is based on author's previous research (Hnízdo 2008).

## **Three main geopolitical concepts of Central Europe**

In the concept of Central Europe with Germany as the political, economic and cultural center, the role of German language is dominant. In areas where speakers of other languages predominate but can be still included in the concept of Central Europe, German

should be the language of wider communication (German as a communication tool in a conversation with a native German speaker and somebody whose first language is different), as well as a *lingua franca* (the language of communication between speakers of other languages). In this concept, German should become the second language for non-native Central European speakers, which would also be the language of instruction at least at some level of their schooling or further study, and also the language used on a nearly daily basis at work or in public.

With the exception of those who understand Central Europe as an area of predominantly German speaking countries, the proponents of the two remaining concepts agree that Central Europe must be seen as a transnational region and, therefore, as a bilingual or multilingual environment. Hence, these concepts are very often placed against the concept of the national state, which is mainly associated with monolingualism, at least in the European environment, with a few exceptions.

In the concept of Central Europe as a space between German speaking states and Eastern Slavic speakers, the common language of communication has never played a significant role. The main reason is that these concepts have always been based on inter-state cooperation among the countries in the region. Traditionally, French has played the role of common communication language here for two main reasons. This concept would appear mainly in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when French was the language of diplomacy and thus of politicians and intellectuals from this region. The second reason was the effort of the political and cultural elite of these states to stand up to German cultural, economic and political dominance, and France at that time, and especially after the First World War, appeared as a natural ally in this effort.

The third concept of Central Europe, which is geographically connected with the Habsburg Monarchy, is inherently transnational, but unlike the preceding concept this one assumes interconnectedness and mutual contacts among people from this region. To do this, it is necessary to have a common language of mutual communication. In this concept, this role has traditionally been played by German.

The aim of this study is to analyse the extent to which these concepts are currently associated with monolingualism, bilingualism or multilingualism. The second question is whether German, which has traditionally played the role of *lingua franca* of Central Europe, is still or at least partially in this position, or whether it is possible that the role has been assumed by English, which, however, cannot ever be perceived as the language associated only with the Central European region. The study is based on a historical comparison where these three concepts, which were emerging mainly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, will be compared with today's reality in terms of their coincidence or difference. In this comparison, emphasis will be placed on the role of language in all three concepts. The main measure of the current existence of these three concepts will be the question of continuity of the traditional role of language in these concepts in today's reality. The effort to geographically define Central Europe in the context of these three concepts and compare it with the geographical form that

was given to them as they emerged will be also based on this point of view. Surveys on the language skills of Central Europe's population in the context of the entire continental Europe will serve as source material. The key source is the latest published large survey conducted by Eurobarometer in 2012 (*Europeans and their languages* 2014).

## **Concept of Mitteleuropa**

The concept of Central Europe with Germany at its center is connected mainly with German nationalism since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was associated with the understanding of Germany in the so-called Greater Germany presentation, which included all historical countries of the Holy Roman Empire, i.e. not only Germany but also Austria, the Czech lands and today's territory of Slovenia. This form of Germany, then in the concept of Mitteleuropa as presented by Friedrich Naumann during the First World War, was to be the economically and culturally dominant force of the whole of Europe (Naumann 1915). Of course, the results of the war did not make it possible to implement this geopolitical concept. Only the wartime success of Nazi Germany in the first years of the Second World War returned the concept to the map of Europe. The occupation of the Czech lands in March 1939, defeat of Poland in the autumn of the same year, German gains in Slovenia after the defeat of Yugoslavia in 1941 and direct annexation of parts of Fascist Italy to the German Reich in 1943 created the political and geographical form of the Mitteleuropa concept. The tragic paradox, however, was the almost complete liquidation of Jewish communities in the region. The communities that traditionally brought about the most significant manifestations of Central Europeanism of preceding decades in literature, in other fields of art or in philosophy and science.

The defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War, the loss of the so-called Eastern territories, the occupation of Germany, its division into two states, West Germany's inclination to cooperate with France and East Germany's position as an important part of the Soviet bloc all confirmed the demise of Central Europe with Germany at its center. Only the end of the Cold War in Europe returned this concept into geopolitical thinking, but in completely different conditions, especially ideological and political, with Germany as a democratic state. The unification of Germany in 1990 again moved this state back more to Central Europe, thus further increasing its significant economic power in Europe, as West Germany has been the strongest economy in democratic Europe since the 1960s. Germany has become not only economically but also politically the leading state of the entire European Union (Rupnik 2019). The first more independent expression of foreign policy of a unified Germany was its progress in the Yugoslav crisis in the first half of the 1990s, when its clear support for the new states, especially for Slovenia and Croatia, was visibly different from France's hesitant stance.

Another factor confirming Germany's new geopolitical role after the end of the Cold War was Austria. During the Cold War, its population increasingly shifted from German identity to Austrian identity, so at the time of the fall of the Iron Curtain, only 6% of Austrians considered themselves Germans. Compared to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

the ratio was almost exactly reversed (Bruckmüller 1996). On the other hand, Austria joined the European Union in 1995 and later on also the Schengen treaty. Following the introduction of the Euro currency, Germany and Austria were united not only by the same language, but also by the same currency, and border controls between the two states also disappeared. The same process took place between Germany and German language minorities in Alsace, in German-speaking community in Wallonia, Belgium (75 thousand) (The German-speaking Community 2007), or in Luxembourg, and between Austria and South Tirol, an autonomous region in Italy with a German-speaking majority (63% of the population) (see: *Statistisches...* 2015). The German-speaking population of Switzerland has traditionally remained outside this process, although it has become part of the Schengen, too.

East of Germany and Austria, this process was far less visible. On the one hand, German communities in these countries are not geographically close to German-speaking countries. An exception is a small German community in Bratislava (Pressburg) (1,500 inhabitants) (*Population and housing census WWW*) and a larger one in Hungarian Sopron (Ödenburg) (4 thousand) (see: Hungarian... WWW). Some communities have shrunk significantly after 1990, such as the one in Southern Transylvania and Banat, Romania (36 thousand) (National Institut of Statistic WWW). The most prominent German community exists in the Polish Opole Region (105 thousand out of 150 thousand Germans living in Poland) (Kamusella 2003), which is geographically distant from Germany, as well as the German minorities around Budapest or Pecs [Fünfkirchen] in Southern Hungary (132 thousand) (see: Hungarian... WWW). After all, none of these countries has adopted Euro yet, with the exception of Slovakia again, and Romania, unlike the aforesaid countries, is a member of the European Union but stands outside the Schengen area.

The geopolitical concepts of Mitteleuropa have always been based on the involvement of other language communities. If we focus on the knowledge of German in smaller language communities in the neighborhood of German-speaking countries, it could be concluded that it is larger than in the French-speaking or Italian-speaking population, but in none of them German is the main foreign language in which the inhabitants of these countries are able to communicate. According to the statistics, in Belgium only 23% of a population is able to communicate in German, but German, despite of being one of the official languages, takes only the fourth place behind French (85%), Dutch (71%) and English (38%). In the neighboring Netherlands, research confirms that 70% of a population is able to speak German but it is still far behind English which is spoken by 90% of a population. The situation is similar in Denmark where 47% of a population speaks German, but English is spoken by 86% (*Europeans and their languages* 2014).

The situation is similar to the east of German-speaking countries. In Poland, 15% of a population is capable of holding conversation in German but 33% speak English (*Europeans and their languages* 2014). The latest data for the Czech Republic demonstrates that 23% of a population is able to communicate in German but 36% speak English (*Statistika a my* 2016). In Slovakia, the difference is smaller – 22% speak German and 26% speak English. The most balanced comparison between German and English can be

seen in Hungary but even here English (20%) starts to be slightly dominant over German (18%). Even in the case of Slovenia, English (59%) wins over German (42%) (*Europeans and their languages* 2014). In all of these countries, it is possible to register a gradual but permanent increase in knowledge of English compared to German, let alone Russian, due to changes in foreign language teaching that has been occurring since 1990 (Hnizdo 2006).

It may be possible to associate the name "Mitteleuropa" with German-speaking countries, but this is not enough to defend the claim that these countries form the core of the geopolitical region of Central Europe. Although German-speaking countries are certainly Europe's largest economy, they by no means have cultural dominance within the wider region, which has traditionally been called *Mitteleuropa*, let alone Europe as a whole. Only 11% of the population of the continental European Union, i.e. without Irish Republic and of course of the United Kingdom, which left the EU, claim to speak German as a foreign language. This is one percent less than in the case of French and far less than in the case of English. German is spoken as a foreign language by 38% inhabitants of the continental European Union (*Europeans and their languages* 2014). From the perspective of the role of German in the contemporary reality, it must be concluded that the concept of *Mitteleuropa* does not cover the entire Central Europe but only its western part, i.e. German-speaking countries. Only here, and nowhere else in Central Europe, German is, of course, the second language for those who do not have it as their mother tongue. Due to the fact that Germany, Austria and Switzerland are very attractive countries for immigrants, their number is becoming very high. However, the geopolitical role and geographical form given to *Mitteleuropa* by Friedrich Naumann more than a hundred years ago is a thing of the past.

### Concept of Visegrad

The geopolitical concept of Central Europe as a territory between Germany and Russia also has a long history, when it has changed several times due to the rapid development of this area in modern history. Unlike the previous concept, it is being associated primarily with Poland as the largest state in the region. Historical roots must be traced in the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Union. Even after the three divisions of Poland and the end of the Napoleonic wars, this project still was not dead. This was mainly due to the effort of Adam Jerzy Czartoryski who, while in exile in Paris, worked on the possibility of its restoration. In a way, it also survived on the political map of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of a beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Russian rulers would mark an area (Pale) in the territory formerly belonging to the Polish State, where solely Jews were to concentrate and to do business. Pale thus became an area of development of Ashkenazi Jewish culture in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The return of Poland to the political map of Europe, along with the emergence of a zone of nation- states between Germany and Bolshevik Russia, revived this concept. It was in particular Józef Pilsudski who sought to promote the "Intermarium", which was

supposed to be a federation of states within the area from the north of Europe down to the south of Balkans. However, the concept was not brought into existence. It is also possible to include into this concept some opinions of T. G. Masaryk published in his book *New Europe* (Masaryk 1920). This concept was also kept, more geographically than politically and ideologically, by another interwar Czechoslovak politician Milan Hodža (see: Hodža 1997). Like the previous ideas, Władysław Sikorski's plan from the time of the Second World War to create a political union between Poland and Czechoslovakia as a kind of bridge between West and East was also not carried out.

Only with the end of the Cold War this concept of cooperation among the states of this region could begin its implementation. In the early 1990s, the Visegrad Group was formed, which recalled even older plans for cooperation among the rulers of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary during the high Middle Ages. The cooperation of the Visegrad Group contributed, for example, to the relatively rapid withdrawal of Soviet troops from these countries; however, the efforts to exploit the cooperation among these states in a pursuit to join NATO and the European Union in the 1990s showed their limits. Ultimately, only Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO in 1999, but it was assumed at the turn of the millennium that, after some changes on the domestic political scene, Slovakia, too, would join (after Mečiar left the Prime Minister's post; Mečiar leaned towards the idea of the role of Slovakia as a "bridge" between West and East, rather than only to the West), and also Slovenia. At the same time, it was also considered that these countries would be included into the first wave of further enlargement of the European Union. In 2001, Visegrad Group seemed to become a visible concept of Eastern Central Europe (in contrast to the Western part, which was politically and geographically understood as an area encompassing German-speaking states). In addition, the Visegrad Four differed significantly from the other post-Communist countries in terms of more advanced economic development and a far more stable domestic political situation.

It did not bring about a change until September 11, 2001. The new international political situation led to a faster and greater enlargement of NATO and the European Union by Baltic and Balkan countries in 2004 and 2007. The specific region of Eastern Central Europe seemed to have lost its geopolitical meaning again. Only the migration crisis in 2015 and perhaps the feeling that the Visegrad Group countries are still perceived in Brussels as a kind of periphery of the European Union gave a new impetus to greater cooperation among the four countries.

However, the question is whether this is sufficient in order to define the Visegrad Group as a specific geopolitical region of Central Europe. There are still visible differences among these countries. On the one hand, there is large Poland and three smaller countries. By bordering Russia (Kaliningrad region) and Belarus, Poland is often closer in its policy to the Baltic states than to other states of the Visegrad Group. Historical conflicts (e.g. between Hungary and Slovakia) and cultural and political differences (e.g. between Catholic Poland and the atheistic Czech Republic) are still visible and perceived in individual countries. The close ties that exist between the Czech Republic and Slovakia at various levels, from political cooperation to mutual travel exchange between the two



states, may be a positive factor of relationship between the two states after the partition of Czechoslovakia, but they are not a fact that would indicate an increase in Central European identity in this region. After all, the language of communication between the Slavic-speaking inhabitants of the Visegrad Group and Hungarian citizens is gradually becoming more and more English than German, which was in this position at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In 2006, more Hungarians and Czechs (the number of Slovaks was balanced) claimed that they were able to hold a conversation in German rather than in English. Eight years later, English much prevailed among the citizens of the Visegrad Group countries (*Europeans and their languages* 2014) – i.e. the language which is not clearly associated with the cultural identity of Central Europe. The Visegrad Group may be understood as a grouping of countries in Central Europe that are able to work closely at the international level, in particular within the European Union, but it cannot be understood as a fully geopolitically distinct region of Central Europe (see: Cabada 2018). This is also confirmed by the language, which is understood as the communication language among the Visegrad Group states. Of course, there is no need of such a wider international communication language in the Czech and Slovak communication; however, in the entire region of the Visegrad Group, this role is now played by English instead of French as in the period between the world wars. The above mentioned only underlines the fact that the Visegrad Group can be understood as an international grouping, rather than a fully geopolitical region of Eastern Central Europe. Where the language of international relations and diplomacy in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. within the period when the main theories of this Central Europe concept were being developed, was French, now it is English. Even in terms of geography, the Visegrad Group does not fill the entire space that was given to this geopolitical concept in the past. Although, there were occasional views on the enlargement of the Visegrad Group, sometimes presented by the Baltic states, sometimes by Slovenia and Croatia, and sometimes by Romania, they have never been successful yet. This also confirms the fact that the Visegrad Group is an organisation trying to promote its interests primarily in the international environment, especially in the European Union, rather than trying to create a geopolitical region between German-speaking states and states speaking East Slavic languages.

### **Concept of legacy of Austria – Hungary**

The geopolitical concept of Central Europe associated with the role of the Habsburg Monarchy is more than two hundred years old. It was the Napoleonic wars that fundamentally changed the main geopolitical axis of Europe. Whereas from the beginning of the Middle Ages, the orientation from the south of the continent up to the north was understood as fundamental, the Napoleonic wars created a new geopolitical polarisation between the European West and the European East (in the minds of European politicians and thinkers, Russia "moved" from the North to the East). It was Konstantin von Metternich, who established a geopolitical stability on the European continent after the

Congress of Vienna in 1815 by the fact that Central Europe (Austria) was able to balance this geopolitical polarisation. This has led to decades of no pan-European conflict. In fact, Palacky's idea of Austro-Slavism also accepted Austria's historical role. This geopolitical role definitely ended with the defeat of Austria by Prussia, creation of dualism (Austria-Hungary) in Habsburg Monarchy and unification of Germany. This created not only a new political and geographical appearance of Central Europe, but also a new geopolitical layout, with Germany's ambition to be not only a leading state in Central Europe but, through the concept of *Mitteleuropa*, to become the hegemon of the entire continent.

In the last fifty years of Austria-Hungary, the ideas of Central Europeanism as a trans-national identity associated with this state would quickly disappear at the expense of a rising tide of nationalism (see: Bruckmüller, Sandgruber 2003), which engulfed almost all nation states of the Monarchy, including the German-speaking ethnic group considering itself mostly as part of the German nation in a sense of the Greater Germany. For the Czechs, the development towards linguistic emancipation was more complicated. While the boundaries between Czech and German speakers remained essentially unchanged in rural areas (Magocsi 2002), the situation in cities with a linguistically Czech environment began to change significantly in the second third of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Especially in Bohemia, perhaps all cities surrounded by Czech linguistic environment became predominantly Czech-speaking already in the 1860s. One exception was České Budějovice where it did not occur until the 1890s (Fialová et al. 1998).

In Moravia, this process was slowed down until the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. On the other hand, the Hausner's law of 1869, which extended compulsory schooling by another three years at the so-called Town Schools (lower secondary education), meant that every Czech would become acquainted with German ever since (Hnízdo 2016). On the contrary, from 1882 after the linguistic division of the Prague University, it was possible to complete university studies in the Czech language. A major milestone were the disputes over Badeni's language regulations in 1897. Badeni's proposal meant not only full equality of Czech and German in the Czech lands, but, in fact, it provided an advantage to Czechs seeking government administration jobs. At that time, educated Czechs were bilingual, unlike native German speakers. The rejection of Badeni's language regulations led to an almost complete separation of the two language communities in the Czech lands. At that time, bilingual street signs in Prague also disappeared, despite the fact that German-speaking communities made up over 20% of the population in the historical parts of the city (Fialová et al. 1998). In purely linguistic terms, Czechs started to abandon Central European identity and fully joined the monolingual concept of the nationalism. The departure of the Old Czechs Party from the Czech political scene was a clear manifestation of this.

Perhaps only the Jewish community was less affected by the ideas of Jewish nationalism, despite the fact that the spiritual leader of Zionism, Dr. Theodor Herzl, was born in Buda and spent most of his life in Vienna. Jews in the Habsburg Monarchy remained the most prominent bearers of Central Europeanism in this monarchy. From a linguistic perspective, Prague Jews can serve us as an example. At the census of

1880, they would still unequivocally declare German a first language (Pěkný 1993). Influenced by the success of Czechs in education (Czech as a language of instruction at the University) or in business (success of the Industrial Exhibition in 1891 as a pure presentation of Czech business), and negative experiences at the time of the discussion over Baden's language regulations (when many shops in Prague Jewish Quarter were damaged by Czech nationalists who condemned their often linguistically German character), 60% of the Jews of Prague declared Czech language as their first language in 1900. The Jews of Prague were real Central Europeans not only because of their bilingualism but also because they were actually the only connecting bridge between Czech and German culture in Prague in the final years of the existence of the Habsburg Monarchy (Kieval 1988).

The disintegration of Austria-Hungary not only provoked the first great wave of nostalgia for Central Europeanism in the Habsburg Monarchy, but the interwar period saw the emergence of perhaps the greatest works of Central Europeanism understood in this way, especially in literature and philosophy, and their authors were very often of Jewish origin. Vienna, Budapest and Prague remained the centres of Central European culture.

Some hope that this concept of Central Europe could return to the map of Europe divided by the Cold War system arose in 1955 with the signing of a State Treaty between the victorious powers of the Second World War and Austria in which Austria committed itself to neutrality and refusal to join German state. Next year, revolutionary Budapest, who was calling in vain for the withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact, declaring neutrality and pushing for the departure of Soviet troops, realized that it was only a matter of hope and not a geopolitical reality. The calls for neutrality in August 1968 in Prague could no longer count with the support even from the reformist leadership of the Communist Party.

The second wave of a certain nostalgia for this concept of Central Europe appeared in the 1970s and especially in the 1980s among intellectuals and dissidents, mainly from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, and to a lesser extent from Poland. Milan Kundera's article on the tragedy of Central Europe, or works by György Konrád, returned the concept and identity of Central Europe to intellectual discourse. In 1984, Czech dissent began to publish a journal "Střední Evropa"(Central Europe), emphasising mainly the conservative values upon which Central European culture was based, especially within the territory of the former Habsburg Monarchy.

## **CENTROPE**

Unlike the previous two concepts (German-speaking countries of the European Union and the Visegrad Group), this concept does not have a clear and visible political and geographical anchoring in any institutional international grouping. However, if we build the concept of Central Europe not only geographically but also upon certain values traditionally associated with Central Europeanism, then this last concept shows us these values, to a certain extent, best. We can associate the Central Europeanism contained in this concept with five principles: geographical (Vienna as a natural center), linguistic

(bilingualism or multilingualism and German as a traditional *lingua franca*), historical and cultural (Catholicism as a cultural basis of a number of similar seasonal customs and traditions in a cross-border region, and many common events in history), ecological (same landscape supporting similar agricultural activities in a cross-border region), and socio-economic (affecting a similar lifestyle not only in rural areas but also in cities).

These principles of Central Europeanism can be found in the CENTROPE Euroregion, which was proclaimed by the Kittzee Declaration in 2003 (see: CENTROPE WWW). The Austrian regions of Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland, the Czech South Moravian region, the Slovak regions of Bratislava and Trnava and Hungarian regions of Győr-Moson-Sopron and of Vas have joined this Euroregion. Since 2007, the entire area has been a part of the Schengen area and is now connected by several road and rail crossings. This significantly facilitates cross-border contact between big cities, such as Bratislava and Brno, and a number of smaller cities (Znojmo, Břeclav, Sopron [Ödenburg]) with nearby Vienna. For many residents of the CENTROPE region, Vienna is also a "gateway to the world" as they use the local international airport, which is more accessible to them than other big airports in more remote Prague or Budapest. Most of 150 thousand Croatians in Austria, most of 136 thousand Czechs living in Austria, 77 thousand Austrian Hungarians, 43 thousand Viennese Poles and majority of 35 thousand Slovaks living in Austria live in the Austrian part of CENTROPE (Statistic Austria 2011). There is also a Slovenian minority living in Vienna and most of them are assumed to be bilingual. A small part of the German and Austrian community also lives within the territories that belong to the CENTROPE region in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. There are 6 thousand of them living in the Hungarian part (see: Hungarian... WWW), fifteen hundred in Bratislava (*Population and housing census WWW*) and even less in the South Moravian region. These small numbers are partially increased by the numbers of German-speaking foreigners with permanent residence. However, knowledge of German is far more visible due to the existence of German-language schools, from preschools up to high school leaving exams, for example in Brno [Brünn], Bratislava or Sopron [Ödenburg]. With its 6% German minority and street names also in German, Sopron [Ödenburg] is *de facto* an officially bilingual city (Hungarian... WWW). In the Czech, Slovak and Hungarian part of the CENTROPE region, the German language is a frequent subject of the curriculum at the second and third level of the schooling system. The majority of the CENTROPE region population professes Catholicism, and it is also necessary to emphasize the cultivation of the same agricultural products (e.g. wine), which naturally creates space for frequent contacts among the inhabitants of the region's border villages.

However, there are no official statistics showing the number of "Central Europeans" in the CENTROPE region, but it can be argued that a considerable number of this region's population would agree with being Central European characterised in this way. There are several cross-border regions in Central Europe (e.g. Cieszyn region or Tirol) but CENTROPE, by its significance, is not just a region but a European region. More than 7 million people live here, its center is the European metropolis Vienna, and it also includes two other large European cities - Bratislava and Brno. Moreover, the Central Europeanism

understood this way must also include three enclaves (and traditional centers of Central Europeanism) with German communities in Prague (5 thousand) (*Foreigners in the Czech Republic* 2019), in Hungarian Baranya region (22 thousand) and mainly in Budapest (35 thousand, and another 270 thousand inhabitants here claim to have German as their first foreign language) (see: Hungarian... WWW).

The question is what role is played by the remaining Jewish communities, which were prominent representatives of Central Europeanism in the territory of the former Habsburg Monarchy before the Second World War. The largest one still lives in Budapest (52 thousand), in Vienna (13 thousand) and in Prague (7 thousand) (*Population and migration* WWW). It should be noted, however, that the Jewish communities in Budapest and Prague today prefer English, which is understood even by Viennese Jews as the key language of international communication. It is both a natural response to what happened during the Second World War, and an expression of compassion with many Jews who would abandon this part of Central Europe from the 1930s until the fall of the Iron Curtain to settle in English-speaking countries rather than in Israel.

After all, since the 1970s English has become the *lingua franca* of Jewish communities around the world. Jewish immigrants to English-speaking countries and to Israel became promoters of Central Europe in these countries as a positive cultural and political phenomenon, especially those coming from the First-Republic Czechoslovakia, which was not as much affected by the anti-Semitism as was the case in Austria, Hungary and Slovakia in the 1930s and 1940s. This community, which, thanks to its traditional features of liberalism, secularism and efforts to integrate into mainstream society, is likely to be gradually assimilated into mainstream society (with the exception of immigrants from Israel or Jews from the former Soviet Union), can no longer be seen as part of Central European identity as characterised by the principles mentioned above.

## Conclusions

If we look at the three traditional geopolitical concepts of Central Europe from the perspective of the current role of German as a traditional communication factor of Central Europeanism, it can be concluded that none of them fulfills it in general, in particular in terms of geography. Although all three concepts exist in some way on the contemporary map of Europe, their scope is much smaller than it was in the minds of politicians and intellectuals more than a hundred years ago. The concept of Central Europe with its centre in German-speaking countries may be currently very significant in terms of economy and politics from a pan-European perspective but German linguistic dominance does not exist in any area adjacent to these countries. Knowledge of German is at all times only second to English. Today, Mitteleuropa is limited to German-speaking countries. Also, the Visegrad Group today does not include all regions that newly appeared on the map of Europe after the First World War. According to this concept, German should not have been the main language of communication in this region anyway. It was supposed to be French a hundred years ago, but today it is increasingly English. German is also currently ceasing to be the

main language of communication between Slavic-speaking citizens of the Visegrad Group and the inhabitants of Hungary. If we consider transnationality and German as the main language of inter-ethnic communication to be the main cultural factor of Central Europeanism, then the CENTROPE Euroregion is the most approximate to this concept. And even here, this identity plays a strong minor role in the population and serves rather as a supplement to national identities of the citizens in this inter-state region. This would not even be the most fundamental change in comparison with the situation in Austria-Hungary. Even during the fifty years of existence of this dual monarchy, its inhabitants for the most part clearly preferred national identity to transnational Central Europeanism. The main difference, however, is geopolitical. In this concept, Central Europeanism at the beginning of the last century was associated with the Habsburg Empire. Today, this concept is applied in a certain way only in the cross-border CENTROPE region.

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